

- Testimony in Support of Hall Bill to Provide for Direct Deposit of Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits -

Washington, DC - U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-Dover) testified today in front of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, in support of his legislation to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to direct deposit student veterans' GI education checks.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill went into affect on August 1, 2009 and provides comprehensive education benefits for service members and veterans who served on active duty for at least 90 days since the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Rep. Hall supported the legislation, which has been widely popular, but believes improvements are needed, such as faster processing and direct deposit of benefit checks.

Rep. Hall testified that veterans in the Hudson Valley must travel all the way to Manhattan simply to pick up their paper check at a cost that can be more than \$45 round trip and take more than 4 hours, leading students to unnecessarily miss work or class. Hall testified that the fastest method to deliver these emergency checks would be via direct deposit to their bank accounts, the same way all other Veterans Benefits Administration benefits are distributed to eligible veterans.

"The new GI Bill provides important and well deserved benefits to our veterans, but the current system creates an unnecessary hassle that hurts our veterans." Rep. Hall said. "Student veterans deserve our best efforts to assist their studies. The status quo is an unacceptable burden, which my bill would relieve."

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Official Congressional Testimony of Rep. John Hall

Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin, Ranking Member Boozman, and Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to speak about my bill, H.R. 4203. My bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to direct deposit student veterans' GI education checks.

Recently, too many student veterans have been left waiting for GI Bill educational benefits that they have applied for but have not yet received. The VA has authorized checks for those students but they are required to travel to one of the VA's regional benefit offices with a photo ID, a course schedule and an eligibility certificate before they can receive their benefits. In many cases, this is a time-consuming, expensive and unnecessary burden.

Veterans in my district, in the Hudson Valley of New York, are currently required to travel to lower Manhattan to collect emergency education benefits. For an Orange County Community College student traveling from Middletown, the roundtrip cost to pick up their education benefits would be \$35 and take more than 4 hours and 30 minutes. For a Marist College student traveling from Poughkeepsie, the roundtrip cost to pick up their education benefits would be more than \$45 and take more than 4 hours and 15 minutes. The New York regional benefit office is open 8:30am to 4:00pm Monday through Friday. Getting to lower Manhattan during the hours the VA's office is open means students will have to skip work or class. Requiring veterans to travel from their homes to a Regional Office in order to receive their benefit creates an onerous and unnecessary burden.

These veterans have already applied for the education benefit, and are in the VBA's system. The fastest method to deliver these emergency checks would be via direct deposit to their bank accounts, the same way all other VBA benefits are distributed to eligible veterans. If necessary, the VBA could require that veterans fax in appropriate documentation, allowing the funds to be released.

The current process is an unnecessary hassle and we should do everything possible to help these veterans get the education they need to succeed after they have served our country so honorably.

In closing, I appreciate your consideration of this bill and ask for your support to ensure that student veterans are able to receive the benefits they have earned and deserve. I look forward to answering any questions you might have about my bill. Again, thank you for holding this hearing and allowing me to testify.

Sincerely,

John Hall

Member of Congress